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ABSTRACT

This Statistics in Brief examines the patterns and characteristics of individual involvement in community service activities from high school through early adulthood. Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), this Brief describes the characteristics of young adults who volunteered, when they volunteered, why they volunteered, and for which types of organizations they volunteered. Based on data from the NELS:88 1992 sample of 12th-grade students--who were asked about their high school volunteer service for the period 1990-92 and then re-interviewed in 1994 and again in 2000--this Brief also examines whether high school volunteer service was related to volunteering 2 years and 8 years after their scheduled high school graduation. (AMT)

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Volunteer Service by Young People From High School Through Early Adulthood

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This Statistics in Brief examines the patterns and characteristics of individual involvement in community service activities from high school through early adulthood. Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), this Brief describes the characteristics of young adults who volunteered, when they volunteered, why they volunteered, and for which types of organizations they volunteered. Based on data from the NELS:88 1992 sample of 12th-grade students—who were asked about their high school volunteer service for the period 1990–92 and then re-interviewed in 1994 and again in 2000—this Brief also examines whether high school volunteer service was related to volunteering 2 years and 8 years after their scheduled high school graduation.

Major findings include the following:

- After high school, young adults as a group were less active as community service volunteers (table 2). Forty-four percent of young adults volunteered in high school compared to 33 percent 8 years later, a 25 percent decline.
- Individual volunteering patterns showed large variation. While about 68 percent of young adults volunteered at least once in the three survey periods, 12 percent volunteered consistently across all survey periods (figure 1 and table 2).
- "Consistent volunteers" were more likely to be female (14 percent) than male (11 percent) and from households of higher socioeconomic status (SES) (table 2).
- Females (50 percent) were more likely than males (38 percent) to volunteer in high school, but no differences were detected between the sexes 2 years out of high school (38 percent for males and 39 percent for females) (table 2). Male volunteering declined further (to 29 percent) by the eighth year after scheduled high school graduation; no change was detected in female volunteering (37 percent).
- White young adults (47 percent) were more likely than Black (36 percent) and Hispanic (38 percent) young adults to volunteer in high school (table 2). Eight years after high school, Blacks (41 percent) were more likely than Whites (32 percent), Hispanics (31 percent), and Asians (27 percent) to report volunteering.

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- Students from households of high socioeconomic status (SES) were more likely to volunteer in high school (60 percent) than students from households of both low (28 percent) and middle (41 percent) SES (table 2). Eight years later, however, volunteering by individuals from high SES households had dropped 35 percent compared to a 20 percent drop in participation by individuals from middle SES households. However, individuals from high SES households were still more likely to volunteer in the year 2000 than those from both low and middle SES households.

- Volunteering in high school was related to later volunteering:
  - Fifty-four percent of adolescents who performed volunteer service in high school (1990–92) volunteered again 2 years later in 1994, whereas 27 percent of those who did not volunteer in high school volunteered in 1994 (table 3).
  - Forty-two percent of adolescents who performed volunteer service in high school (1990–92) volunteered again 8 years later in 2000, whereas 26 percent of those who did not volunteer in high school volunteered in 2000 (table 4).

- No difference in the likelihood of volunteering 8 years after graduation was detected between young adults who performed only mandatory volunteer service in high school and students who performed no high school volunteering (28 vs. 26 percent, respectively) (table 4). Both of these groups—mandatory and nonvolunteers—were less likely to volunteer 8 years after high school than persons who were strongly encouraged to volunteer or did it for strictly voluntary reasons (43 percent).

Introduction

Encouraging young adults to volunteer to serve their community is widely viewed as beneficial to the individual as well as to society. In volunteering, individuals can take responsibility for their community, learn to understand the conditions that other people face, and appreciate the value of community participation (Calabrese and Schumer 1986; Youniss, McLellan, and Yates 1997; Nolin et al. 1997; Smith 1999; Metz and Youniss 2003).

Many schools and postsecondary institutions have established programs that promote, and in some cases require, student community service (Frase 1995; Nolin et al. 1997). Education administrators have emphasized student volunteerism by incorporating service experiences into classroom activities and graduation requirements (Kraft 1996; Skinner and Chapman 1999; Stukas, Snyder, and Clary 1999; Eyler 2002). Past research has found that students who participate in these programs tend to have stronger ties to school, peers, and the community, as well as a higher exhibition of other positive social behaviors (Nolin et al. 1997; Youniss, McLellan, and Yates 1997; Smith 1999; Metz and Youniss 2003). Given these potential benefits, it is important to understand the characteristics and patterns of volunteering among young adults.

The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) provides insight into community service from high school through young adulthood. Previous research using the NELS:88 1992 senior class found that 44 percent reported performing community service when asked about the past 2 years (1990–92) (Frase 1995). Females, Whites, Asians, and students from households of higher socioeconomic status were more likely to volunteer than other seniors. In the early 1990s, high school students were most often motivated to volunteer for "strictly voluntary" reasons (table 1). Thirty-eight percent said their participation was strictly voluntary compared to 17 percent who were strongly encouraged by someone else, 7 percent who were required for class, and 9 percent who were required for other reasons.[1]

This Brief extends these cross-sectional findings about high school volunteering and examines the volunteering activities and patterns of the same 1992 senior cohort 2 years and 8 years after most cohort members had graduated from high school. The characteristics of young adult volunteers, their motivation for volunteering, and the types of organizations for which they volunteered may have important implications for their participation in community service later in life; encouraging early involvement with volunteer organizations may lead to an enduring habit of service (Smith 1999; Metz and Youniss 2003). By identifying the patterns of persistence and desistence in volunteering by young adults, a portrait of these initial, formative years is described. To that end, this Brief provides estimates of the prevalence and quality of volunteering activities by individual demographic characteris-

[1] These responses were not mutually exclusive; students could have volunteered multiple times for different reasons. The estimates were recomputed using the NELS:88/2000 "Fourth Follow-up" data file and the "Fourth Follow-up" panel weight, F4F2PNWT.

Table 1. Percentage of young adults, by participation in unpaid volunteer or community service activities, motivation for participation, and select student characteristics: 1990–92

Student characteristic	Participants					Non-participants[1]
	Motivation					
	Strictly voluntary	Court-ordered	Required for a class	Required for other reasons	Strongly encouraged by someone else	
All students	37.7	1.6	7.4	9.2	17.0	54.2
Sex						
Male	31.9	2.1	6.3	8.2	14.8	59.7
Female	43.7	1.1	8.5	10.1	19.3	48.7
Race/ethnicity						
White, non-Hispanic	40.9	1.3	7.4	8.6	18.3	51.9
Black, non-Hispanic	28.5	3.7	6.8	10.8	13.4	62.1
Hispanic	29.8	1.3	7.6	10.7	13.5	59.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	36.4	1.2	9.0	13.8	17.2	52.0
Native American/Alaska Native	17.4	0.8	2.2	1.9	8.0	77.1
SES[2]						
Low quartile	22.3	1.3	4.4	6.7	8.7	69.6
Middle two quartiles	35.4	1.7	6.7	8.4	16.1	57.4
High quartile	52.8	1.6	10.9	12.2	24.3	38.2

[1]Nonparticipants did not report performing volunteer service for the 1990-92 period.

[2]SES = socioeconomic status of household in 1988.

NOTE: Percentages are of the total population for each group. Respondents may have reported more than one motivation.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), "Fourth Follow-up, Student Survey, 2000."

tics in 1990–92, 1994, and 2000. Changes in the level of participation and type of volunteering are described over the 10-year period. Finally, the relationship between high school volunteering in 1990–92 and volunteering 8 years later, in 2000, is examined. All comparisons in the text are statistically significant at the 0.05 level unless otherwise noted. Large apparent differences between estimates may not be statistically significant due to large standard errors that render them unreliable. (See technical appendix for additional details.)

Changes in Volunteer Service Among Young Adults, 1990–2000

This section examines changes in volunteer service participation by young adults, as a group and individually, starting with their high school years in 1990–92, then in 1994, and again in 2000. Individual patterns of volunteer service onset, persistence, and desistence within these three survey periods are compared to the aggregate group patterns. Prevalence and change across these three time periods were examined by sex, race/ethnicity, and 1988 household socioeconomic status (SES).

Young adults as a group were less active as community service volunteers after high school. Volunteering among this 12th-grade cohort declined 25 percent 8 years after high school, in 2000 (table 2). Forty-four percent of young adults volunteered in high school compared to 33 percent 8 years later. A decrease occurred just 2 years after high school where volunteering declined from 44 percent in 1990–92 to 39 percent in 1994. For the entire 1990–2000 period, however, 68 percent of all young adults reported participating at least once in unpaid community service.

This aggregate pattern is made up of a variety of individual volunteering patterns as shown by the onset, persistence, and desistence across these three survey periods (figure 1 and table 2). While 44 percent of young adults volunteered in high school, 24 percent volunteered in both high school and 1994, and 18 percent volunteered in high school and 2000. Twelve percent of young adults volunteered consistently across 1990–92, 1994, and 2000, compared to 68 percent who volunteered at least once during the three survey periods.

Consistent volunteers were more likely to be female (14 percent) than male (11 percent). They were also more

likely to be from higher SES households. Twenty percent of young adults from high SES households were consistent volunteers compared to 10 percent from middle SES households and 6 percent from low SES households. No differences in the percentage of consistent volunteers were detected between race/ethnicity groups with one exception. All race/ethnicity groups reported higher percentages of consistent volunteers than Native Americans.

A number of young adults volunteered in one period only (table 2). Fourteen percent of young adults volunteered only in high school (1990–92), 9 percent volunteered only in 1994, and another 9 percent in 2000.

As reported for this same high school senior sample in 1990–92 (Frase 1995), volunteering patterns varied by sex, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status over the 10-year period.

Volunteering differences by sex. Overall, females were more likely than males to volunteer at least once in this 10-year period (73 percent vs. 63 percent, respectively) (table 2). Females were more likely than males to volunteer in high school (50 percent vs. 38 percent, respectively), but no difference in the level of participation by sex was detected 2 years out of high school (39 percent and 38 percent, respectively). By 2000, however, male volunteering had declined once again and females were more likely to volunteer than males (37 percent vs. 29 percent, respectively). For males, no differences were detected in the percent volunteering between high school and 2 years after high school (38 percent in both cases). Males were less likely to volunteer 8 years out of high school in 2000 (29 percent) than they were in both 1990–92 and 1994 (38 percent in both cases).

Examining individual patterns, females were more likely to volunteer both in 1990–92 and 1994, and in 1990–92 and 2000 than males (table 2). Twenty-seven percent of females volunteered in both high school and 1994 compared to 21 percent of males. Twenty-one percent of females volunteered in both high school and 2000 compared to 16 percent of males.

Volunteering differences by race/ethnicity. Overall, Whites (47 percent) were more likely to volunteer than Blacks (36 percent), Hispanics (38 percent), and Native Americans (19 percent) in high school (1990–92) (table

Table 2. Percentages of students who reported participating in an unpaid volunteer or community service activity in high school and in subsequent follow-up periods, by select student characteristics: 1990–92, 1994, and 2000

Student characteristic	Volunteer 1990–92	Volunteer 1994	Volunteer 2000	Volunteer 1990–92 and 1994	Volunteer 1990–92 and 2000	Volunteer 1990–92 only	Volunteer 1994 only	Volunteer 2000 only	Volunteer 1990–92 and 1994 only	Volunteer 1990–92 and 2000 only	Consistent volunteering 1990–92, 1994, and 2000	Any volunteering 1990–92, 1994, or 2000	Percent change 1990–92 to 2000[1]
All students	44.0	38.7	32.8	23.7	18.3	14.1	9.3	8.9	11.6	6.1	12.2	67.8	-25.4
Sex													
Male	38.2	38.0	29.0	21.0	15.6	12.2	11.3	7.6	10.5	5.1	10.5	62.9	-24.2
Female	49.8	39.4	36.6	26.5	21.0	16.1	7.4	10.2	12.7	7.2	13.8	72.8	-26.4
Race/ethnicity													
White, non-Hispanic	46.6	40.3	32.2	25.9	18.9	14.5	7.6	8.7	13.1	6.1	12.8	68.6	-30.8
Black, non-Hispanic	35.9	35.5	40.9	17.4	17.7	11.7	16.0	10.9	6.5	6.8	10.9	70.0	13.8
Hispanic	37.5	33.3	30.7	18.8	16.7	12.9	9.4	10.0	7.9	5.8	10.8	61.5	-18.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	45.7	34.9	26.7	20.4	16.7	18.8	6.3	10.8	10.1	6.4	10.3	66.5	-41.5
Native American/ Alaska Native	19.1	39.4	26.6	10.4	4.8	7.4	15.7	22.9	6.9	1.3	3.5	63.8	39.3
SES													
Low quartile	27.8	26.1	25.0	12.1	10.7	11.2	10.9	10.6	5.9	4.5	6.2	52.7	-10.1
Middle two quartiles	41.2	35.4	32.9	19.8	16.3	15.1	10.7	9.6	9.8	6.2	10.1	67.4	-20.1
High quartile	59.8	53.0	38.7	38.5	27.4	14.1	4.8	8.0	18.3	7.2	20.2	79.1	-35.4

[1]Percent change, 1990–92 to 2000, is derived by dividing the difference between the percentages of volunteers in 2000 and 1990–92 by the 1990–92 percentage.

NOTE: SES = socioeconomic status of household in 1988.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), "Fourth Follow-up, Student Survey, 2000."

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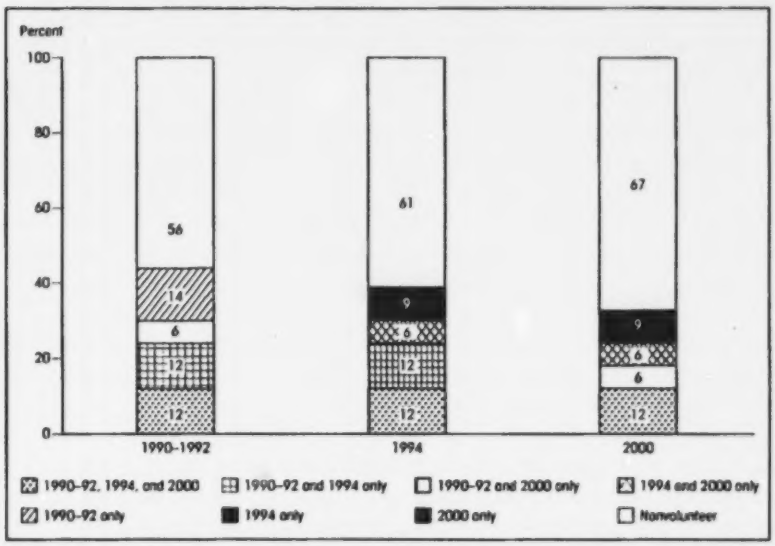
Figure 1. Percentage of young adults participating in an unpaid volunteer or community service activity in high school and in subsequent follow-up periods: 1990-92, 1994, and 2000



NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Nonvolunteers included those who did not participate in volunteer activities and a small percentage of nonrespondents.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), "Fourth Follow-up, Student Survey, 2000."

2). Volunteering among Whites declined 31 percent (from 47 percent to 32 percent) between their high school years (1990–92) and the year 2000 (table 2). Asians also showed a decrease in volunteering from 1990–92 to 2000 (46 percent vs. 27 percent, respectively).[2] Whites (69 percent) and Blacks (70 percent) were both more likely than Hispanics (62 percent) to volunteer at least once during the study period.

Examining individual patterns, Whites were more likely to volunteer in 1990–92 and 1994 than Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans (table 2). Twenty-six percent of Whites volunteered in high school and 1994 compared to 17 percent of Blacks, 19 percent of Hispanics, 20 percent of Asians, and 10 percent of Native Americans.

Volunteering differences by SES. Overall, young adults from higher SES households were more likely to volunteer than young adults from lower SES households for all time periods (table 2). In high school, 60 percent of students from high SES households volunteered compared to 41 percent from middle SES households and 28 percent from low SES households. By the year 2000, volunteering by individuals in the high SES households had dropped to 39 percent. However, individuals from high SES households were still more likely to volunteer in the year 2000 than those from both low and middle SES households. Volunteering by individuals from low SES households did not show a detectable change from high school through 1994 and 2000 (28, 26, and 25 percent, respectively). Volunteering by individuals from middle SES households decreased from the 1990–92 high school years (41 percent) to 1994 (35 percent), but no differences were detected between 1994 and 2000 (33 percent).

Examining individual patterns, young adults from high SES households were more likely to volunteer both in 1990–92 and 1994, and in 1990–92 and 2000 than young adults from low SES households (table 2). Thirty-nine percent of individuals from high SES households volunteered in both high school and 1994 compared to 12 and 20 percent of individuals from low and middle SES households, re-

[2] Although the percentage of Blacks who volunteered appears to increase between 1990–92 and 2000, this increase is not statistically significant. The standard errors associated with these estimates are relatively large.

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spectively. Twenty-seven percent of individuals from high SES households volunteered in both high school and 2000 compared to 11 and 16 percent of individuals from low and middle SES households, respectively.

Volunteering Patterns 2 Years After High School

After high school, many students either go on to a postsecondary educational institution, enter the labor market, or both.[3] These individuals may marry, have children, and live on their own. These life changes place additional constraints on time and finances that may limit involvement in unpaid community service. On the other hand, many colleges and universities provide their students with the opportunities and resources to engage in such service, which may increase the level of participation among young adults. In this section, the characteristics of young adults who perform volunteer service 2 years after high school and the organizations for which they volunteer are examined.[4]

In 1994, 2 years after scheduled high school graduation, 39 percent of the young adult cohort performed some type of unpaid community service (table 3). This was a decline from the 44 percent of the cohort who volunteered in high school (table 2). The type of organization for which young adults volunteered in 1994 was varied (table 3). Twelve percent of young adults volunteered for church-related organizations, 11 percent in hospital settings, and 10 percent for youth organizations.

Volunteering differences by sex: 1994. As noted earlier, 38 percent of males and 39 percent of females volunteered in 1994 (table 3). In 1994, 12 percent of males volunteered for church-related organizations, 11 percent for youth organizations, and 9 percent for hospitals and for sports clubs. Thirteen percent of females volunteered for church-related organizations and hospitals, and 10 percent volunteered for youth organizations.

Volunteering differences by race/ethnicity: 1994. In 1994, the only racial or ethnic difference detected was the 7 percentage point gap between Whites and Hispanics (table 3). Forty percent of Whites volunteered compared to 33 percent of Hispanics. In terms of organizational preference, Blacks were more likely to volunteer for church-related organizations (15 percent) than any other type of organization.

Volunteering differences by SES: 1994. Some high school volunteering patterns were still evident 2 years later. As in high school, young adults from high SES households were more likely to volunteer than those from middle and low SES households in 1994 (53 percent vs. 35 and 26 percent, respectively) (table 3). This SES pattern also held for specific organizations. Young adults from high SES households were more likely to volunteer for church-related, youth, and hospital organizations than individuals from both middle and low SES households. Young adults from low and middle SES households preferred to volunteer with church-related organizations compared to other types of participation.

Volunteering differences by high school volunteering: 1994. Many high schools have implemented community service programs seeking immediate benefits to the student and community; another common intention is to spark a lifetime interest in volunteering (Metz and Youniss 2003; Sobus 1995; Stukas, Snyder, and Clary 1999; Youniss, McLellan, and Yates 1997). Examining the relationship between high school volunteering and volunteering later in life, students who volunteered in high school were more likely to volunteer 2 years later (54 percent) than students who did not volunteer in high school (27 percent) (table 3).

Additionally, the relationship between high school volunteering and future volunteering may be related to the motivation behind high school volunteering. Students who volunteered solely because it was required—mandatory volunteers only—were still more likely to volunteer 2 years later than those who did no volunteering in high school (37 percent vs. 27 percent, respectively) (table 3). However, both mandatory volunteers and students who did not volunteer were less likely to volunteer in 1994 than students who volunteered because they were strongly encouraged or for strictly voluntary reasons (56 percent). (See technical appendix for volunteering definitions.)

Volunteering Patterns 8 Years After High School

In the year 2000, 8 years after scheduled high school graduation, many students had graduated from a postsecondary institution and started a career in the labor market.[5] Others had been working since high school. In

[3] In 1994, 56 percent of the 1992 senior cohort reported being enrolled in at least one academic course in a 2- or 4- year college, and 63 percent reported being employed in either full- or part-time jobs. Eighty-eight percent reported being involved in at least one of these activities.

[4] The classification of volunteer organizations did not remain constant across the multiple waves of the NELS:88 survey. This prevents any detailed examination of how adolescent volunteering changed by organization types.

[5] In 2000, 35 percent of the 1992 senior cohort reported having at least a bachelor's degree and 89 percent were employed for pay. See Ingels et al. (2002) for a detailed look at the NELS:88 cohort in 2000.

Table 3. Percentage of young adults participating in unpaid volunteer or community service activities, by organization type and select student characteristics: 1994

Student characteristic	Youth organizations	Union, farm, trade, or professional association	Political clubs or organizations	Church or church-related activities[1]	Organized volunteer work in hospital	Sports teams or sports clubs	Educational organizations	Other	Any volunteering[2]
All students	10.2	1.7	3.4	12.1	11.1	6.9	6.2	7.8	38.7
Sex									
Male	10.7	1.9	3.4	11.5	9.0	9.2	5.3	7.7	38.0
Female	9.7	1.5	3.4	12.6	13.1	4.5	7.2	7.9	39.4
Race/ethnicity									
White, non-Hispanic	10.6	1.9	3.2	11.7	12.3	7.3	5.9	8.3	40.3
Black, non-Hispanic	8.5	1.0	4.4	15.3	6.6	5.2	6.0	7.6	35.5
Hispanic	10.3	0.7	3.2	10.9	7.0	6.7	8.5	5.5	33.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	7.7	1.5	3.2	9.6	14.5	4.8	7.2	7.3	34.9
Native American/Alaska Native	11.2	3.8	3.4	21.2	3.7	8.9	7.4	1.6	39.4
SES									
Low quartile	6.2	0.5	1.1	9.5	4.6	4.4	3.4	5.6	26.1
Middle two quartiles	9.3	1.6	3.2	11.8	9.1	6.6	5.5	6.9	35.4
High quartile	14.8	2.5	5.1	14.4	18.9	9.4	9.4	11.2	53.0
High school volunteering									
Any[2]	16.1	2.2	5.1	18.7	17.1	8.5	10.1	10.8	54.0
Mandatory only[3]	10.9	1.0	4.8	8.3	11.0	5.4	4.2	6.9	36.8
Strictly voluntary or encouraged[4]	16.7	2.2	5.2	19.7	17.8	8.8	10.8	11.2	55.9
None	5.3	1.3	1.9	6.6	6.3	5.5	2.8	5.5	26.5

[1] Does not include worship.

[2] "Any volunteering" indicates participation with at least one type of organization.

[3] This group reported performing volunteer work that was court-ordered, required for class, and/or required for another reason, and did not also indicate any other motivation.

[4] A percentage of this group reported volunteering that was court-ordered, or required for a class or other reason, in addition to strictly voluntary service.

NOTE: SES = socioeconomic status of household in 1988.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), "Fourth Follow-up, Student Survey, 2000."

addition, this period often involves activities related to family formation and child-rearing, among others. Overall, 33 percent of young adults said they performed volunteer work for either a youth or community organization in 2000 (table 4). No difference was detected between the level of volunteering for either youth or community organizations (21 percent and 22 percent, respectively).[6]

Vounteering differences by sex: 2000. In general, females were more likely than males to volunteer in 2000 (37 percent vs. 29 percent, respectively) (table 4). Females were more likely than males to volunteer for both youth organizations (22 percent vs. 19 percent, respectively) and civic/community organizations (24 percent vs. 20 percent, respectively). Within each sex group, there was no observed preference for either youth or community volunteering.

Volunteering differences by race/ethnicity: 2000. Blacks were more likely than Whites, Hispanics and Asians to volunteer in 2000 (41 percent vs. 32, 31, and 27 percent, respectively) (table 4). Among all racial/ethnic groups, only Whites had a volunteering preference for one type of organization over the other. Whites were more likely to volunteer for civic/community organizations than youth organizations (22 percent vs. 20 percent, respectively). In 2000, Blacks (29 percent) were more likely to volunteer for youth organizations than Whites

[6] The classification of volunteer organizations did not remain constant across the multiple waves of NELS:88. This prevents any detailed examination of how adolescent volunteering changed within and between organizational types.

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(20 percent), Hispanics (20 percent), and Asians (15 percent). Blacks (27 percent) were also more likely to volunteer for civic or community organizations than Hispanics (19 percent), Asians (19 percent), and Native Americans (13 percent).

Volunteering differences by SES: 2000. In the year 2000, as in all time periods, young adults from higher SES households were more likely to volunteer than young adults from lower SES households (table 4). Thirty-nine percent of persons from high SES households volunteered compared to 33 percent from middle SES households and 25 percent from low SES households. Regardless of service type—youth or civic/community—individuals from low SES households volunteered less often than individuals from both middle and high SES households.

Volunteering differences by high school volunteering: 2000. As with the 1994 data in table 3, high school volunteer service was examined in relation to volunteer service in 2000, 8 years after scheduled high school graduation. Once again, young adults who volunteered in high school for any reason were more likely to volunteer in some capacity 8 years later than persons who did not volunteer in high school (42 percent vs. 26 percent) (table 4). However, while the 1994 relationship showed that mandatory volunteers were more likely to volunteer 2 years after high school than nonvolunteers, no difference was detected between these groups in 2000. When comparing the 2000 volunteering of persons whose only reported motivation for high school service was that it had been required—by court order, for school, or for another reason—to that of those who did not volunteer in high school between 1990 and 1992, no difference could be detected (28 percent vs. 26 percent, respectively). Any positive impact that mandatory high school service had on facilitating future volunteer service as demonstrated in 1994 was not detected in 2000. Further, compared to those whose high school service was either strictly voluntary or strongly encouraged, both mandatory volunteers and non-high school volunteers were less likely to volunteer in 2000 regardless of organization type (youth or civic/community).

Discussion

The findings presented here extend previous research on the volunteering behaviors of young adults by following their activities over a 10-year period. While these findings are not exhaustive or definitive, they point to several trends of interest.

One trend is the general decrease in unpaid community service in the years after high school. As young adults moved on from high school into the worlds of postsecondary education and/or employment, fewer chose to take part in volunteering activities. While about 68 percent volunteered at least once, 12 percent volunteered consistently across these three survey periods. Individual patterns of volunteering revealed a range of onset and differing degrees of persistence among young adults in their volunteering activities. The general decrease in volunteering may result from any number of factors; possible causes include the weakening of incentives for service—such as school credit or approval from prospective postsecondary schools—after high school, a reduced number of visible and easily accessible volunteering opportunities in the lives of college students and young working adults, or a simple change in priorities or reduction in free time after leaving high school. A more detailed examination of this phenomenon would be of interest to those who would promote lifelong volunteering in general, or who belong to groups (e.g., religious organizations) seeking to retain young volunteers as they move into adulthood.

Another notable trend is that overall volunteering decreased after high school for most groups. Specifically, volunteering decreased for Whites, Asians, males, females, and persons from middle and higher socioeconomic households. The decrease in volunteering followed different patterns over time for these groups; however, examining the social, religious, economic, and/or cultural factors that may play a role in shaping these patterns might contribute to a better understanding of what influences young adults to stop volunteering, or to volunteer persistently.

A final trend of interest concerns the motivation to volunteer. Compulsory unpaid service has long been a subject of debate. Many have raised criticisms; Sobus (1995), for example, questioned the psychological wisdom of schools formally requiring prosocial behaviors. Others charge that such requirements cheapen true voluntarism, can act as a guise for school-sponsored political activism, and may in fact reduce future volunteering (Stukas, Snyder, and Clary 1999). On the other hand, the advent of community service requirements in schools is testament to some school officials' belief that requiring community service is a sound educational practice (Eyler 2002; Metz and Youniss 2003). This movement is supported by research that reports many individual and community benefits associated with volunteering (Metz and Youniss 2003). This debate clearly involves considerations beyond the empirical trends discussed here. Still, those trends

Table 4. Percentage of young adults participating in unpaid volunteer or community service activities, by service type and select student characteristics: 2000

Student characteristic	Youth organizations	Civic/community volunteer	Any volunteering[1]
All students	20.6	22.0	32.8
Sex			
Male	18.9	19.7	29.0
Female	22.3	24.3	36.6
Race/ethnicity			
White, non-Hispanic	19.7	21.9	32.2
Black, non-Hispanic	29.2	26.9	40.9
Hispanic	19.5	19.1	30.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	14.8	19.2	26.7
Native American/Alaska Native	18.5	13.4	26.6
SES			
Low quartile	16.0	15.5	25.0
Middle two quartiles	20.8	22.5	32.9
High quartile	23.4	26.4	38.7
High school volunteering			
Any[1]	26.0	28.2	41.5
Mandatory only[2]	15.4	19.5	28.2
Strictly voluntary or encouraged[3]	27.2	29.2	43.0
None	16.5	17.0	25.9

[1] "Any volunteering" indicates participation with at least one type of organization.

[2] This group reported performing volunteer work that was court-ordered, required for class, and/or required for another reason, and did not also indicate any other motivation.

[3] A percentage of this group reported volunteering that was court-ordered, or required for a class or other reason, in addition to strictly voluntary service.

NOTE: SES = socioeconomic status of household in 1988.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), "Fourth Follow-up, Student Survey, 2000."

are worth noting: there is a positive relationship between high school volunteering that was not motivated solely by a requirement, and later service; and no relationship between high school volunteering motivated by a requirement, and later service.

Data from NELS:88 provide a valuable look at volunteering by young people, an activity that is widely heralded but not fully measured or understood. These empirical findings demonstrate that community service is a common part of the American young adult experience—at some point during the decade following their entry into high school, two-thirds of young people volunteered with churches, youth groups, hospitals, schools, sports teams, or some other organizations. Beyond this basic finding, however, is evidence of great variety in who volunteers, when, and for what. As schools and communities continue to promote unpaid service as a means to individual character and societal improvement, the relevance of empirical data about volunteering among young people will only increase.

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Technical Notes

Definition of terms and criteria used. This Brief examines what the NELS:88 refers to as "unpaid volunteer or community service activities." For the sake of brevity, other terms are used interchangeably with this one, including "volunteering" and "unpaid community service." Note that these terms are applied to service activities that were court-ordered, required for a class, or required for another reason, and were therefore not literally voluntary. On the other hand, the terms are meant to exclude any work for which participants received compensation, even in the case of a stipend-granting community service program whose staffers may be popularly referred to as "volunteers."

The definitions of several other terms and criteria also bear explaining:

In Table 2, "1990–92 volunteer" refers to respondents who in 1992 reported having performed unpaid community service in any category, and for any motivation, "(d)uring the past two years (from January 1, 1990 to the present)." "1994 volunteer" and "2000 volunteer" refer to respondents who reported unpaid community service in any category, and for any motivation, during the previous 12 months from the survey interview date.

The NELS:88 collected information regarding the individual's motivation to participate in high school unpaid community service. For the period of 1990-92, students reported whether their volunteering could be described as any of the following: strictly voluntary, court-ordered, required for a class, required for other reasons, or strongly encouraged by someone else (table 1). These responses were not mutually exclusive; students could have volunteered multiple times for different reasons. In Tables 3 and 4, under high school volunteer, "Any" refers to any respondent who reported any unpaid community service activities in 1990–92. "Mandatory" refers to any respondent who reported performing volunteer work that was

court-ordered,[7] required for class, or required for another reason, and who did not also indicate any other motivation. "Strictly voluntary or encouraged" refers to any respondent who reported volunteer work that was either strictly voluntary or strongly encouraged. The respondent may have also reported mandatory volunteering as another reason in addition to either of these two.

Information on demographic and other individual characteristic was obtained from composite variables available on the NELS:88/2000 public-use ECB/CD as follows:

- Respondent's sex was obtained from F4SEX.
- Respondent's race/ethnicity was obtained from F4RACE, which includes the following categories: Asian/Pacific Islander; Hispanic; Black, not Hispanic; White, not Hispanic; and Native American/Alaska Native.
- Socioeconomic status (SES) was obtained from F2SES1Q, which is a quartile coding of the composite variable, F2SES1. F2SES1 provides an SES scale score for each individual that is derived from the following parent questionnaire data obtained in the base year (1988): father's education level, mother's education level, father's occupation, mother's occupation, and family income. Respondents were considered to be from households of "high" SES if their households' SES fell in the highest quartile of all respondents' households. Households in the lowest quartile were considered "low" SES, and households in one of the two middle quartiles were considered "middle" SES.

Information about the type of high school volunteering that students performed in 1990-92 is presented in table A1. This information is similar to the information presented in Frase (1995). The table is provided here with the estimates recomputed using the NELS:88/2000 fourth follow-up datafile and the fourth follow-up panel weight, F4F2PNWT.

[7] A small number of respondents (32 unweighted cases) reported only court-ordered service and not any other motivation. It is quite possible that the content, structure, incentive, impact, and, of course, motivation associated with court-ordered community volunteer service differs substantively from the other types of required service. To assess the impact of these cases, the estimates provided in tables were reanalyzed without them. None of the findings were significantly different, suggesting no evidence of substantial bias.

Given the definitions and coding procedures used in this Brief, there are a number of limitations the reader should consider regarding the findings. First, the time periods and reference periods related to volunteering are not consistent across surveys. Respondents are given a 2-year reference period in high school (1990–92) and a 12-month reference period for both 1994 and 2000. The resulting estimates of high school volunteer participation in this report are, however, somewhat consistent with other studies of volunteering at this stage in life. The National Household Education Surveys of 1996 and 1999 show that 56 and 61 percent of students in grades 11 and 12 participated in community service, respectively (Kleiner and Chapman 1999). Given the methodological differences between these two studies and the historical changes in volunteering as suggested by Kleiner and Chapman (1999), the estimates in this report are expected and consistent.

The survey follow-up periods vary from 2 years between 1990-92 and 1994 and 6 years between 1994 and 2000. Another important limitation is the lack of consistent items across surveys to measure volunteering. Finally, the sample used in this analysis focused on respondents who were in the 12th-grade cohort in the second follow-up survey. This excludes individuals who had dropped out of school in previous waves, did not participate in the second follow-up or were missing for some other reason. Each of these factors could lead to an over- or underestimation of volunteering. In addition, if different groups are disproportionately impacted by these limitations, this introduces the potential for bias estimates.

Survey Design and Methodology

NELS:88 surveyed a middle school/junior high school cohort, the 8th-grade class of 1988. Along with student surveys, NELS:88 included surveys of parents, teachers, and school administrators. The study also administered cognitive tests in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies to the sample members. High school transcripts were collected in 1992 and postsecondary education transcripts were collected in the fall of 2000. The sample was "freshened" at each of the first two follow-up studies,[8] generating a 10th- and a 12th-grade nationally representative sample in the first follow-up (1990) survey and the second follow-up (1992) survey, respectively. Thus, NELS:88 follows an 8th-, 10th- and 12th-grade cohort over time.

[8] The process referred to here as "freshening" added students who were not in the base-year sampling frame. The 1990 freshening process provided a representative sample of students enrolled in 10th grade in the spring of 1990. The 1992 freshening process provided a similar representative sample of 12th-grade students in the spring of 1992.

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Table A-1. Percentage of young adults, by types of unpaid volunteer or community service activities and select student characteristics: 1990–92

Student characteristic	Youth organizations	Service organizations	Political clubs or organizations	Church or church-related activities[1]	Community centers, neighborhood or social action associations	Organized group in hospital or nursing home	Educational organizations	Conservation, recycling, or environmental group
All students	10.6	5.0	3.9	21.7	10.1	7.9	9.1	5.9
Sex								
Male	12.2	3.9	3.0	17.9	7.8	4.9	6.2	4.8
Female	9.0	6.1	4.8	25.6	12.5	11.0	12.1	7.1
Race/ethnicity								
White, non-Hispanic	12.3	5.4	3.8	23.0	10.3	7.9	9.2	6.6
Black, non-Hispanic	5.1	3.0	5.0	17.0	10.7	6.5	10.1	4.2
Hispanic	7.2	4.4	3.6	18.9	8.2	8.1	8.0	3.2
Asian/Pacific Islander	7.5	5.8	4.8	25.3	12.7	12.9	9.9	6.9
Native American/Alaska Native	6.3	0.9	1.0	5.3	3.1	5.0	2.9	2.6
SES								
Low quartile	4.9	4.7	2.3	12.6	4.7	4.6	6.8	2.3
Middle two quartiles	9.9	9.5	3.6	20.3	9.5	7.2	8.4	4.9
High quartile	16.2	14.4	5.7	30.1	14.4	11.8	11.6	10.0

[1] Does not include worship.

NOTE: SES = socioeconomic status of household in 1988.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), "Fourth Follow-up, Student Survey, 2000."

The fourth follow-up (NELS:88/2000) took place in 2000, the year in which most sample members turned 26 years of age and typically were 8 years removed from high school enrollment. This follow-up study focused on the educational and labor market processes and transitions experienced by young adults. Interviewing began in January 2000. Interview topics included experiences with postsecondary education, labor market participation, job-related training, community integration, and marriage and family formation. For a discussion of general limitations of the NELS:88/2000 design, methodology, and data contents, see Curtin et al. (2002).

Response Rates

The NELS:88/2000 base-year sample was drawn in two stages—schools first, then students. The base-year questionnaire was completed by 24,599 students, for a weighted response rate of 93 percent. The weighted response rates for the student questionnaires at the four subsequent follow-up surveys were 91, 91, 91, and 83 percent, respectively. A more comprehensive account of response rates can be found in Curtin et al. (2002).

Sampling/Weighting

Weights for the fourth follow-up study were developed in several steps. In the first step, unadjusted weights were calculated as the inverse of the probabilities of selection, taking into account all stages of the sample selection process. In the second step, a general exponential model was employed to compensate for unit nonresponse. In order to maintain consistency in weights across the multiple data collection waves of NELS:88 (i.e., to ensure that weighting totals reflected the population totals of the original group of interest), multidimensional raking was also applied to these nonresponse-adjusted weights. The raking was performed with respect to base-year through fourth follow-up-study response status, dropout status, race/ethnicity, sex, and school characteristics.

The estimates in this report were produced using F4F2PNWT, the panel weight for 12th-grade members of the NELS:88 sample who were respondents during the second (1992), third (1994), and fourth (2000) follow-ups. In addition, the sample was selected using the 12th-grade cohort flag (G12COHRT) that captures respondents who were in the 12th grade during the second follow-up survey.

This NELS:88/2000 unweighted sample size included 10,262 respondents who participated in the 1992, 1994 and 2000 follow-up surveys, representing 2,542,851 12th-grade students. This sample size is somewhat smaller than the original weighted sample of the 12th-grade class cohort. This reduction in the target population between 1992

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and 2000 is due to a variety of factors. Respondents identified as dropouts in the second follow-up student survey (1992) were excluded from this report. Additional sample loss is a result of death, emigration, and other reasons. In some cases, the unweighted sample sizes are lower than 10,262 because of item nonresponse. For the sample used in this report, the item nonresponse range for key items was 0 to 2.1 percent.

Survey Standard Errors

Because the NELS:88 sample design involved stratification, the disproportionate sampling of certain strata, and clustered (i.e., multistage) probability sampling, the resulting statistics are more variable than they would have been had they been based on data from a simple random sample of the same size. The NELS:88/2000 analyses included in this report used the Taylor Series procedure to calculate standard errors as generated by the AM statistical program (am.air.org). This procedure is also found in advanced statistical programs such as SUDAAN or STATA. Examples of standard errors are presented in table A-2.

Statistical Tests

Comparisons that have been drawn in the text of this report have been tested for statistical significance to ensure that the differences are larger than those that might be expected due to sampling variation. The statistical comparisons in this report were based on the *t* statistic and an alpha of 0.05.

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For More Information

For more information about this Statistics in Brief or the data set, contact Jeffrey Owings, Project Officer, National Center for Education Statistics, 1990 K Street NW, Washington, DC 20006-5651; or call 202-502-7423; or e-mail Jeffrey.Owings@ed.gov. To download files and documentation, visit the NELS web site (http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/nels88/).

Table A-2. Standard errors for percentages of students who reported participating in an unpaid volunteer or community service activity, by select student characteristics: 1990–92, 1994, and 2000

Student characteristic	Year			Any volunteering 1990–92, 1994, or 2000
	1990–92	1994	2000	
All students	0.91	0.85	0.81	0.86
Sex				
Male	1.22	1.25	1.10	1.31
Female	1.24	1.17	1.21	1.05
Race/ethnicity				
White, non-Hispanic	0.97	0.90	0.81	0.89
Black, non-Hispanic	3.54	3.20	3.61	3.15
Hispanic	2.42	2.57	3.00	2.64
Asian/Pacific Islander	3.72	3.06	2.75	3.36
Native American/Alaska Native	6.16	8.58	6.66	7.64
SES				
Low quartile	1.50	1.60	1.63	1.91
Middle two quartiles	1.18	1.15	1.15	1.13
High quartile	1.55	1.47	1.43	1.31

NOTE: SES = socioeconomic status of household in 1988.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), "Fourth Follow-up, Student Survey, 2000."

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